

The Executive Summary: A Guide to Effective Presentation Preparation Part 2

By Nick Washienko

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Linkage partners with Nick Washienko on [How Leaders Connect: Crafting and Delivering Impactful Presentations](#)-A two-day immersion program that gives you the knowledge, the skills, and the attitude that you need to add that extra 15-20% that gives you your competitive edge in delivering impactful messages.

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Unleash your full potential.

While you are speaking.

- ◆ **Make Eye Contact**

Making eye contact is hard to do under the best circumstances and next to impossible to do if you do not know your content. It is also hard to project credibility in a room if you read. One cannot read and make eye contact at the same time. Your natural inclination is to pull your eyes away from the audience. Fight that inclination and make eye contact.

- ◆ **Be Animated**

This is a hard subject to talk about and I hope that you do not misinterpret my comments. I am not suggesting that you act differently from the way you are. However, conclusive studies show that audiences read animation for conviction. They read slow and even delivery for uncertainty. In order to feel compelled to listen to what you have to say, your listeners need to sense your enthusiasm. Be committed to what you are saying, and say it with conviction. Be animated.

- ◆ **Speak Loudly**

With few exceptions, a strong voice conveys authority and credibility, while a quiet voice conveys uncertainty and doubt. It is also easy to remain motionless when you are speaking quietly. But if you project your voice, and speak strongly, your gestures will become larger and more animated. Your whole body gets involved. Now, you may be frightened that this will make you look out of control. On the contrary, it will make you more believable and more effective. Speak loudly.

- ◆ **Speak Quickly And Clearly**

Speaking quickly and clearly will energize you and your audience. This does not mean that you should race through your presentation. Just keep the pace moving. Even if you think you speak too quickly, that is a rare occurrence. You may not be speaking loudly enough, and someone may ask you to slow down so that they can hear and interpret. Keep in mind that people speak at approximately 150 words per minute. Your listeners can take in as many as 250 words per minute. So don't worry about speaking too quickly. Do not feel compelled to slow down. It can drag the whole presentation down as well. Speak quickly and clearly.

Don't forget these items.

- ◆ **Know The Last Four Sentences Cold**

Remember the suggestion that you know your first sentences cold? Well it is equally important that you know your last four sentences cold. Otherwise, the end comes upon you very quickly, and it is very difficult to create an ending on the spot. Often, when people do not have an ending prepared, they end by asking if there are any questions. The problem is that your listeners don't know if you are just saying that or if you really mean it. If they get the sense that you are just saying it, they will not ask any questions, and then you have to ease yourself off the stage. Decide the last three or four sentences before you begin. Be brief and to the point, and know the last four sentences cold.

- ◆ **Get Your Listener's Attention**

Begin with a specific statement that is certain to get your audience's attention. Generally, this takes the form of a startling statistic, a quote, a story, or a powerful bold statement, e.g., "Do you know that 50% of the people in the room will not work for this company in two years?" Keep it brief and move on, but get your listener's attention.

- ◆ **Segue To A Main Point**
Now that you have their attention, you need a simple sentence or two connecting the audience to your main point. Think well about the sentences. You will not make a good connection if you don't.
- ◆ **Make Your Case**
Write out in plain English exactly what it is that you want to say. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this step. In my experience, most executives do not decide what they are going to say beforehand, so they end up talking around the subject, and never sound convincing. You must decide your main point. Let it answer this question: "Let me tell you exactly what I want to say to you today," or, "If I could say in one sentence exactly what I want to tell you today, it would be." No matter how you say it, make your case.

Outlining for clarity.

- ◆ **State The Benefit**
Never assume that your listeners are aware of what you are about to say, and how it will affect them. If you are saying something important to your audience, let them know by telling them exactly what it is. Begin with something like: "Now let me tell you why this is so important for you to hear this " or you might try: "Let me tell you how you'll benefit from this talk." Remember, know your four first sentences cold, and state the benefit.
- ◆ **Lay Out Your Logic**
This step is performed solely for the benefit of the audience. Your audience has no idea of how you plan to proceed with the exposition of your materials. They do not see the logic that is in your head. Reduce your materials to three main points which form the logical backbone of your talk. Remember, your audience has never heard this talk before. Guide them by telling them, "I'm going to divide my presentation into three main points. These three main points are a, b, and c." this allows them to visualize what's in your head, making it easier to follow along.
- ◆ **Develop Each Point**
How should you develop each point?
 - a. Define what each point means.
 - b. Provide additional data so your listeners understand what the point means.
 - c. Give your listeners an example. Say those magic words: "Let me give you an example so that you can see what I mean."
 - d. Answer the question: "So what?" You have told your listeners something, but what does it mean to them? Never assume that they know. Tell them, by developing each point.
- ◆ **Conclude**
Summarize in brief. Don't deliver the talk again. Don't repeat what you just said. Quickly reinforce the three main points, and state how these three points once again illustrate the main purpose of your whole talk. And remember: you should know your ending cold.

Using visuals effectively.

- ◆ **Begin With You**
Stand away from the overhead and talk for at least 1 minute before using any slides, overheads, videos, or other visual aids. That gives you a chance to create a positive dynamic in the room. It also gives the audience the chance to react to you and get to know you. If you use the outline above, then you should know the 4 sentences you have to say. Just get through your introduction and lay out the logic of your talk. By the time you have done that, you will have spoken for at least 1 minute. Using visuals at the very beginning of your talk tells the audience that the visual aid is more important than what you have to say, leaving you virtually no opportunity to establish your presence in the room. Remember, the most important element of any presentation is you. Begin with yourself.
- ◆ **Direct Their Attention To The Screen**
When you show your first overhead, ask your audience to turn their attention to the screen. Why? Because they will look at it anyway. By directing them to view it, you are showing that you have command over the audience. Direct their attention to the screen.
- ◆ **Allow 4 Seconds Of Silence**
Allow about 4 seconds of silence when introducing an overhead, so that the audience can absorb what they are seeing. Remember, they cannot figure out the overhead and listen to you at the same time. Give them the time they need. 4 seconds.
- ◆ **Resist Overhead Dependence**
Look at your listeners and not at the screen. Your listeners want to make contact with you. They want to know how you feel and think about things. Resist the temptation to look at the overhead. Keep talking to the audience and resist overhead dependence.

A final observation.

Delivering a presentation is a very simple interaction. Don't overcomplicate it! Your listeners just want to hear what you have to say and have a sense that you care about them and about your message. The issue is not your intelligence or how many facts you know. It is easy for you to hide behind your information, somehow believing that if what you say is right, you have accomplished your task. But that is only one part of your task. The crucial element is projecting yourself as an interesting, engaging, credible speaker and person.

Your listeners are there to get a sense of what you think is important to them. It is absolutely critical that you decide before you begin what it is that you have to share with them. Once you have decided what you have to say, say it. Don't try to be fancy. Don't try to deliver a speech. Talk to them. Be direct. Look them in the eye. Speak a bit more strongly. It will help to create that sense of urgency and importance. It will give you more spark and make you seem more interesting and engaging. Most of all, be yourself and tell your listeners what you have to say.

I hope that this executive summary has been effective in helping you prepare for your presentation. Remember, the more you practice, the more accomplished you will become. And, in the final analysis, the most important element is YOU!

Good luck!

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